

An Imbalance of Suffering - I do believe that a Great Listening is needed

William Lay
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Thomas Walsh: I'd like now to invite Dr. William Lay to speak. He teaches Criminal Justice at the University of Bridgeport. He's an attorney. I'd like to invite him to share his thoughts for our discussion today.

Thank you Dr. Walsh and thank you to the panelists who preceded me. I was educated by your comments. I am the chair of our Criminal Justice Department at the University of Bridgeport. In my classes and in my program I have probably 50 percent persons of color, African American, Hispanic and Asian. I teach the US Legal System, I teach US Government with the mayor of Bridgeport, Joe Ganim. He brings in his police chief and his police officers to meet the students. I teach Law and Economics; I teach Constitutional Law. I've got students that will be law enforcement officers, they're aspiring to be police officers, FBI.

One alumnus is a Secret Service agent; others are attorneys, prosecutors, corrections people [working with the prison system as guards, etc..]

One week ago, we had a video assembly, a Zoom assembly, to just begin to think about the matter. Twenty courageous faculty and students participated in it.

It's not always easy to be there and to turn that video on and to speak. One of my colleagues, a black woman, a professor, spoke about raising her son, who is now ready to go to college and giving him special warnings on how to conduct himself in public so that he doesn't get labeled as an out-of-control young black man. I know she didn't want to put those kinds of ideas in his mind or suppress him. But as a mother she had no choice; and she shared that. Another one of my students, who is an African American young woman and is now an assistant district attorney in Queens County New York shared her feelings of being on the law enforcement side and how difficult it is for her. I always remember her because on the first day of class, when she was a new student, I asked if anyone had the US Constitution on them and she did! Her interest in it and her willingness to learn it led her to be an assistant district attorney.

Based on that and just on my own way of looking at things, I do believe that a Great Listening is needed. A great deal of listening needs to be done. And even if you are an academic or a police person who says that racism is not systemic, it is individualized, I would say that we just need to listen right now. Even if you are a person who feels that the police have been misunderstood, I'd say we need to listen and listen with our heart.

The other thing I believe is that we have to address the tremendous economic imbalance and the imbalance of suffering. And I don't believe government can do it, because I believe government interventions may lead to great economic dislocation. Really, we need a lot of personal generosity. In other words, hearts must change, and it must translate into acts of personal generosity on the order of magnitude of taxation. Unless we have that, we are going to continue to have problems.

Lincoln, in his famous Second Inaugural Address, said that "the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil..." would be sunk on the battlefield. And here we have in this year, 2020, this extraordinary year, we see... I mean, in Lincoln's terms, God may allow the wealth of America to be wasted by inflation and economic stagnation. I know there is a bounce back right now in the stock market and unemployment is easing. That's wonderful. But let us not wait for a collapse before we show generosity and address the extreme imbalance of resources and suffering. So, those are some of my thoughts. I'm looking forward to a little more dialogue with my fellow panelists.

Thomas Walsh: Thank you, Professor Lay. I applaud the concept of a Great Listening and I thank you for calling attention to the economic inequality that is out there. We hear a lot about the systemic issues but there is remaining the individual responsibility. What are the virtues that have been cultivated in our wider society, in our communities that are needed if we are to pull together in trust and solidarity?